

Chanukah for Grownups

Rabbi Deborah J. Brin

The Books of the Maccabees: The First Book of Maccabees and Second Book of Maccabees, which chronicle the story of the rebellion that inspired Hanukkah, were not included in the Bible, and are instead part of a body of texts known as the Apocrypha. Also in the Apocrypha is the Book of Judith, which tells how this heroine stopped the siege of Jerusalem by decapitating Holofernes, a major military leader for the enemy. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/women-as-role-models/>

The Heroine Judith: [The most famous tradition] associating women with the Hanukkah miracle . . . is that of Judith and Holofernes. During the Maccabean wars, Judith's hometown of Betulia was besieged by a Greek army led by Holofernes. The military situation appeared to be hopeless. Despite the fact that she was a modest, shy widow, Judith volunteered to go on a dangerous mission to save the town. Dressed stunningly, she went to seek out Holofernes. The general, besotted with lust, invited her to his tent and remained alone with her. She plied him with wine and good food [including cheese]. When he was overcome with sleep, she cut off his head and escaped. When the Greeks discovered Holofernes' death, they fled in panic and the town was saved." [p.275]. Rabbi Irving Greenberg The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays

Judith & The Commentators: Although Judith is never mentioned in the Talmud itself, later commentators on the Talmud refer to her, always in the context of Chanukah. These commentators do not tell Judith's story for its own sake, but use elements of her tale to explain the commandments and customs of the holiday. . . Rashi's grandson, the Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, 1085-1174), does mention Judith, and he is quoted as saying that the chief miracle of Purim came about through Esther, and that of Chanukah through Judith (Tosafot, b. *Megillah* 4a).
Professor
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Three Commandments for Women: Women are required to light the Chanukah lamp, read the Megillah [Purim story], and drink four cups of wine at Passover. Why? Because we were involved in making those miracles. [af hein ha'yu b'osah ha'nes]. Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 23a [Chanukah]; Megillah 4a [Purim]; Pesachim 108a-b [Passover].

Distortion of the Maccabean Revolt: "In the conventional exposition, the central theme of Hanukkah is usually represented as the victory of Hebraism over Hellenism - - that is, of Jewish over Greek values . . . An equally serious distortion of history is the prevalent idea that the Maccabean revolt represented a people's uprising of the Jews against their Syrian overlord. For while it is true that the movement eventually attracted a large number of supporters, the record makes it perfectly plain that the official spokesmen of the Jewish community were hostile to it and, moreover, that the bulk of the Jewish population was already so far gone in the process of assimilation that the championship of Israel's distinctive identity meant nothing to it. The high priest at the time was a rank 'collaborationist,' and the accredited leaders of the Jews were what might be described as 'Hellenes of the Mosaic persuasion.' It was only after Mattathias and his followers had gained the support of the religious pietists and, by a fanatical vigilantist campaign, had forced the apostates back into the fold, that they could muster

sufficient strength to offer serious opposition to the state.” Theodor H. Gaster Festivals of the Jewish Year [pp.237 & 239]

Not by Might, Not by Power, but by My Spirit Alone [Zechariah 4:6]: “Our rabbis taught: On the 25th of Kislev [begin] the eight days of Hanukkah . . . the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed [over the Greeks] and defeated them, they searched and found only one bottle of oil sealed by the High Priest. It contained only enough for one day’s lighting. Yet a miracle was brought about with it, and they lit [with that oil] for eight days.” Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 21b.

“ . . . The rabbis have no more to say about the internal divisions of the Jews, the revolt against Antiochus, the victory of the Maccabees, the rededication of the Temple. Why this cautious attitude toward Hanukkah? The reason is that the rabbis were not happy with the Maccabean approach to Jewish life. They were writing in the period when similar revolts against Rome, seeking to win the Jews political independence . . . had been systematically and brutally smashed by the iron fist of Rome . . . And so, without utterly rejecting the national liberation movement, they refocused attention away from it toward God’s miracle – toward the spiritual meaning of the light that burned and for eight days was not consumed.” [p.91]. “The real conflict is not between the Rabbi and the Maccabee, between spiritual and political, but between apathy and hope, between a blind surrendering to darkness and an acting to light up new pathways. Sometimes the arena will be in outward action, sometimes in inward meditation. But always the question is whether to recognize the darkness – and transcend it.” [p.101]. Arthur Waskow Seasons of Our Joy

The Word “Chanukah”: “The essence of the word *Hanukkah* – a dedication – is the ability of Judaism to continue. And historically, continuity has meant three elements: remembrance, education and resistance. These elements seem especially resonant this year, when history, knowledge, and the ability of the individual and society to stand up are all under attack.

Since the days of Antiochus in 168 BCE, Hanukkah has been about roots and holding on to them. We light to remember, to learn, and to honor resistance when who we are is threatened. And we light to dedicate ourselves, again, to the labor and responsibility of being free. This year, when calls to resist again punctuate the darkness, maybe the word we need to continue is *Hanukah*.”

Aviya Kushner ‘Why the Most Fascinating thing About Hanukkah is The Word Itself’
Forward December 2017

The Festival of the Daughters: In North African countries, the seventh night of Chanukah, Judith's night of triumph, was set aside as *Chag haBanot*, the Festival of the Daughters. . . In countries such as Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco, a variety of customs surrounded Chag haBanot. One tradition was that women would come to the synagogue, touch the *Torah*, and pray for the health of their daughters. Mothers would give their daughters gifts, and bridegrooms would give gifts to their brides.

Rabbi Jill Hammer <https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/chag-habanot-festival-daughters>

Cheese Latkes

Of course we associate potato latkes with Hanukkah, but in reality latkes descend from Italian pancakes that were made with ricotta cheese. The first association between Hanukkah and pancakes was by a rabbi in Italy named Rabbi Kalonymus ben Kalonymus (c. 1286-1328). According to The Encyclopedia of Jewish Food by Gil Marks, the Rabbi “included pancakes in a list of dishes to serve at an idealized Purim feast, as well as a poem about Hanukkah. After the Spanish expelled the Jews from Sicily in 1492, the exiles introduced their ricotta cheese pancakes, which were called cassola in Rome, to the Jews of northern Italy. Consequently, cheese pancakes, because they combined the two traditional types of foods—fried and dairy—became a Hanukkah dish.”

Potato latkes are a more recent Ashkenazi invention that gained popularity in Eastern Europe during the mid 1800's. A series of crop failures in Poland and the Ukraine led to mass planting of potatoes, which were easy and cheap to grow. But before potatoes came on the scene, the latke of choice was cheese.

<https://toriavey.com/toris-kitchen/cheese-latkes/>

See the full post:<https://toriavey.com/toris-kitchen/cheese-latkes/#imAq6vL2v36zD346.99>

16-18 latkes

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup high quality whole milk ricotta cheese
- 3/4 cup flour
- 3 large eggs
- 2 tbsp granulated white sugar
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- Nonstick cooking oil spray, for frying

YOU WILL ALSO NEED A FOOD PROCESSOR & A LARGE SKILLET. Combine all ingredients except the nonstick oil in a food processor. Process the mixture for about 45 seconds, pausing a couple of times to scrape the sides, until the mixture forms a thick batter.

- Spray a skillet with nonstick cooking oil and heat over medium. Use a spoon to scoop up the batter, then pour it onto the hot skillet in the size/shape of silver dollar pancakes. Use 1-2 tablespoons of batter per pancake. Spread it out into a thin circle after it hits the skillet.
- Fry the latkes for 2-3 minutes on each side until they turn golden brown. Test the first latke for doneness and make sure it's cooked all the way through; if the latkes are browning faster than they're cooking, reduce skillet heat. Expect some variation in the shape of the latkes, they won't form a perfect circle. Serve immediately.
- These latkes can be eaten plain or topped with a drizzle of honey. Other toppings include jam or preserves, sour cream, maple syrup, yogurt or agave nectar

More recipes: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/recipe/cheese-latkes/>

<https://www.joyofkosher.com/recipes/cheese-latkes-2/>